

Clifford Curzon Brahms & Grieg Piano Concertos



The death of Sir Clifford Curzon on September 1st [1992] is a loss to the musical world out of all proportion to the modest number of recordings he made. It would be fruitless to compare him with other artists. When I first met and started to work with him more than 20 years ago, he was already an institution.

Because of his astonishingly fastidious approach to any score, accompanied by his highly sensitive musicianship and unique musical humour, his work became a criterion by which other performances have come to be judged. To him, every performance was something new, and no two were ever the same. It reminded me of those fascinating films one occasionally sees when a photograph is taken at regular intervals during the growth and life of a plant, which more than anything else illustrate the sheer vibrancy as well as the constant change which is at the heart of nature.

This was the reason he made so few recordings, for he refused to consider any performance as being remotely definitive, and believed passionately in the evolution of a composer's work through performance after performance.

Curzon's first recording was made on April 1st, 1937 when he recorded the Schubert *Liszt Wander Fantasy* with the Queen's Hall Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood. His recording career extended over the next 40 years almost exclusively with Decca, culminating in the live recording of the *Thema and Variations* from Schubert's *Trout Quintet* with members of the Amadeus Quartet in The Maltings, Snape during the Branson and Hedges Music Festival from September 28th to September 30th, 1977.

He did not like the recording studio at all, and refused to allow the use of the customary red light which normally indicates that the tape machine is running. More recently he flirted with the idea that the only way to record was to "catch the performance on the wings", but although he was scheduled to record two more Mozart concertos with the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Bernard Haitink in January 1984 in live performance, it was the first time he had consented to the experiment. The results would have been fascinating in relation to his other recordings, which to him became outdated by the further musical discoveries he always made after the record was completed. Of course this would have applied to the live recording as well...

Ray Minshull (Decca Executive Vice-President) - Granophone, October 1982 (*obituary of Sir Clifford Curzon - excerpt*)

Transfer notes

Despite the presence at both sessions which produced these recordings of Decca's crack recording duo, producer John Gushaw and engineer Kenneth Wilkinson, there was a marked difference sonically in the results they achieved. Indeed, the earlier recording of the Grieg, made in London in 1951 - and still prepared as for a 78rpm release which didn't happen (an additional Chopin fill-up side was also recorded but never issued) - sounds particularly dim and dusty. Revising this recording has perhaps been the major achievement in this release, with 32-bit XR remastering injecting a sense of life and reality missing from the Decca LP. By contrast, the 1953 Brahms is a different matter altogether, recorded with a clarity that surely makes it a model recording of its era. Both recordings have also benefited audibly from the latest pitch stabilisation techniques, especially again the Grieg, where what would have been the third 78rpm side (the final third of the first movement) was distinctly flat by comparison to the rest of the recording. AR

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Curzon



BRAHMS Piano Concerto No. 1 GRIEG Piano Concerto Decca Studio Recordings, 1953 & 1951



Concertgebouw Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra

conductor Eduard van Beinum
conductor Anatole Fistoulari



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BRAHMS PIANO CONCERTO No. 1 - GRIEG PIANO CONCERTO
CURZON - LSO, FISTOULARI; CONCERTGEBOUW ORCH, VAN BEINUM

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disc
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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Front cover artwork based on a
photograph of **Clifford Curzon**

Rear cover artwork based
on a photograph of **Brahms**

Recording producer: **John Culshaw**
Recording engineer: **Kenneth Wilkinson**

Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1
Recorded 19 May-1 June 1983
Concertgebouw, Amsterdam
Transfer from Decca LTX 2825

Grieg Piano Concerto
Recorded 15-16 October 1981
Kingsway Hall, London
Transfer from Decca LTX 2687

Total duration: **77:45**

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